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NOTES ON GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

New distributional bird records from the eastern Andean slopes of Ecuador

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ABSTRACT: Distribution of birds is dynamic. Understanding, documentation and appropriate use of new records are essential, especially when managing threatened species. Here we present novel data regarding new distributional records for 17 bird species along the Amazonian slopes of the eastern Ecuadorian Andes. The new records fill gaps on our knowledge in the distribution, both in latitude and altitude.

Although knowledge on the distribution of birds on mainland Ecuador has been well studied (Fjeldså and Krabbe 1990; Ridgely and Greenfield 2001; 2006), during recent years an inspiring number of articles have been published documenting new discoveries on the distribution of birds in mainland Ecuador (*e.g.* Freile 2004; Vogt 2007; Solano-Ugalde *et al.* 2009). Presenting new records is essential to better understand dynamic population issues, which in some instances can be related to changes in land-use practices (Renjifo 1999). Moreover, increasing knowledge of distributional patterns has proven useful for modeling and predicting actual ranges of little-known and threatened species (Freile *et al.* 2010). In this note we present new records, some of them expected but with no previous documentation, for 17 bird species on mainland Ecuador.

These records were gathered opportunistically during field work carried out throughout the Ecuador, mainly while conducting expeditions and leading tourist groups. Taxonomy follows Ridgely and Greenfield (2001; 2006).

Records are presented for a total of 17 bird species, including 13 families, and 17 genera. The records were collected in five provinces, accounting for the majority found in the eastern slopes of the Ecuadorian Andes.

ANATIDAE

Blue Winged Teal *Anas discors* Linnaeus, 1766 - On the afternoon of 8 October 2008 a Blue-winged Teal was observed perched on in a small pool of shallow water at the edge of the Río Quijos, Napo province (1,650 m above sea level - a.s.l., 00°25' S, 77°49' W). As the bird preened we were able to record diagnostic field marks (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001). Subsequently, the bird tucked its head under its wing, roosting on one leg. Blue-winged Teal is a migrant overwintering in Ecuador mostly in lowland and highland wetlands (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001; 2006). This record makes for the first of the species in subtropical forests on the east slope of the Andes.

ACCIPITRIDAE

Snail Kite *Rostrhamus sociabilis* Cassin, 1854 - Two individuals in juvenile plumage were seen flying over the old-Zamora Airstrip on 6 March 2008, Zamora-Chinchipe province (950 m a.s.l., 03°59' S, 78°53' W). Both birds glided parallel to the Río Zamora and stayed in view for approximately 15-20 minutes. This sighting constitutes a new provincial record for Zamora-Chinchipe and an upper altitudinal record for the country (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001; 2006).

Black-And-Chestnut Eagle *Oroaetus isidori* (Des Murs, 1845) - On 20 January 2007 a large raptor, mostly all white from below, was seen briefly crossing over Papallacta Antennae (Napo province), however due to the briefness of the observation identification was uncertain. The next morning, what seemed the same bird was found at the entrance of Reserva Ecológica Cayambe-Coca (Papallacta Lakes sector, 3,800 m a.s.l., 0°22' S, 78°13' W). This time the bird was well studied in good light conditions for 8 minutes while it soared before perching 1.2 km away. A buffy-brown conspicuous crest, whitish buff under-parts, large dark and scalloped wings, together with prominent size were sufficient to identify the raptor as a juvenile *O. isidori*. These records constitute the highest record for Ecuador, previously known only to 3,000 m a.s.l. (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001; 2006).

FALCONIDAE

Buckley's Forest Falcon *Micrastur buckleyi* Swann, 1919 - A *Micrastur* sp. falcon was found perched 20 m up on the slopes adjacent to Cabañas Yankuam (Zamora-Chinchipe province, 900 m a.s.l., 04°15' S, 78°39' W) early in the morning on 5 March 2008. For a 15 minutes period it remained partly hidden, occasionally preening, at which time was studied with a telescope. During the last three minutes, the bird concentrated on preening its tail and we clearly observed only four bands at the distal rectrices (not

more as in Collared Forest-Falcon *M. semitorquatus*). Upon play-back of Buckley´s Forest Falcon, the bird stopped preening, stretched its neck, checked the surroundings, and departed to the forest interior. Three minutes later, what was inferred to be the same bird, based on its location inside the forest, responded to playback with two full calls. Buckley´s Forest Falcon is regarded as rare in the lowlands of eastern Ecuador where it was previously known to occur as high as 300 m a.s.l. Subsequently, specimens from Cordillera del Cutucú collected at 1,800 m a.s.l. (Robbins *et al.* 1987) were regarded as dubious by Ridgely and Greenfield (2001). Our record, at 900 m, in the neighboring Cordillera del Condor, is congruent with recent records from neighboring Peru, a country with similar mountains resting close to Amazonian forests, where the species is known locally up to 1,350 m a.s.l. (Schulenberg *et al.* 2007).

CRACIDAE

Nocturnal Currasow *Nothocrax urumutum* (Spix, 1825) - On the evening of 5 September 2006, while conducting Military Macaw *Ara militaris* (Shaw, 1792) surveys in the buffer zone of Sumaco National Park (see details of the site and species in Arcos-Torres and Solano-Ugalde 2008), we detected the booming notes typical of Nocturnal Currasow. We subsequently observed two birds approaching shyly to within 6 m while feeding on the fallen fruits of an unidentified tree for 5 minutes (Orellana province, 1,100 m a.s.l., 00°42' S, 77°29' W). This currasow has been recorded to 400 m a.s.l., with smaller numbers to 900 m in Ecuador (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001; 2006), and to 600 m in Peru (Schulenberg *et al*. 2007). Our record extends the known altitudinal range to 1,100 m a.s.l.

CHARADRIIDAE

Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis* (Molina, 1782) - A group of six was first seen in December 2006 at the Lluscahuyco Trout farm, near the Guacamayos ridge (Napo province, 2,100 m a.s.l., 00°36' S, 77°52' W). The species was later found along the Las Caucheras Road, close to Cabañas San Isidro (M. Lysinger, personal communication), where this it is now known to breed (H. Greeney personal communication). Groups of up to 11 individuals can regularly be found in wet pastures with short grasses. There appear, however, to be seasonal fluctuations in numbers (personal observation). The known distribution of Southern Lapwing in Ecuador has been dynamic since it was first discovered in the country in the 1970´s (see Ridgely and Greenfield 2001 for summary of records). Until recently, however, the species' expanding distribution had reached only to 400 m a.s.l., with wandering individuals higher. The records presented here account for the highest in the country, but also apparently for other parts of its range.

STRIGIDAE

Tropical Screech-Owl *Otus choliba* (Vieillot, 1817) - On 15 December 2008 this species was heard when two interacting individuals were identified for the first time in the gardens of Casa Upano (Morona-Santiago province, 980 m a.s.l., 2°19'098" S, 98°07'075" W). On 20 December this species was seen, recorded, and photographed in the same area. Since then, this species has proven to be regular in the surroundings in this area, with up to five records a week. Previously, Tropical Screech-Owl was known mainly from the northern provinces of Napo and Pastaza, thus our records represent the first for Morona Santiago province, and are from an elevation 300 m higher than the previously known altitudinal distribution (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001; 2006). This species, however, has been recorded up to as high as 2,400 m a.s.l. in neighboring Peru (Schulenberg *et al.* 2007).

APODIDAE

White-Tipped Swift *Aeronautes montivagus* (d'Orbigny & Lafresnaye, 1837) - This swift is regarded as rare to locally common, with the majority of observations coming from the northern portion of the country (*e.g.* Río Guayllabamba and Chota drainages, Ridgely and Greenfield 2001; 2006). On 29 September 2007 four adults in the company of three juveniles were first heard vocalizing, and later observed, as they flew over the Ulba River at San Antonio de la Montaña (Tungurahua province, 2,150 m a.s.l., 01°25'20" S, 78°24'16" W). This species has also been seen there by others (L. Jost, personal communication). This record fills a distributional gap between the northern part of the country and the few of sightings that suggest resident populations in the south (Catacocha in Loja, P. Coopmans *in litt.*, Río Rircay in Azuay), and in Buenaventura, El Oro (Best *et al.* 1993).

TROCHILIDAE

Amethyst-Throated Sunangel *Heliangelus amethysticollis* (d'Orbigny & Lafresnaye, 1838) - During bird surveys in San Antonio de la Montaña (Tungurahua province) several adult males were observed in the riparian forest vegetation of Pacuyacu River. Amethyst-throated Sunangels' were frequently seen visiting a common litophytic bromeliad which was blooming at the time. They were in the area for about two months (September-November 2005), and on several occasions were observed having antagonistic encounters with Collared Inca *Coeligena torquata* (Boissoneau, 1840). The only other Sunangel (*Heliangelus* sp.) species known from this area is Tormaline Sunangel *H. exortis* (d'Orbigny & Lafresnaye, 1838). The individuals observed, however, were easily distinguished from *H. exortis*, as only Amethyst-throated exhibits a complete white collar with pinkish-purple gorget. Previously thought to be restricted to south-eastern Ecuador (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001; 2006), its presence was only recently confirmed farther north in Napo province (Vogt 2007). Our record fills the gap between these two records.

FURNARIIDAE

Speckled Spinetail *Cranioleuca gutturata* (d'Orbigny & Lafresnaye, 1838) - A single Speckled Spinetail was recorded on 4 March 2008 in the gardens of Cabañas Yankuam (Zamora-Chinchipe province). The bird moved rapidly among dense tangles in the riparian forest of Río Nangaritza. In Ecuador this species has been recorded mostly below 400 m a.s.l., with records as high as 600 m near Lumbaqui (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001; 2006), and our record extends its upper altitudinal limit to 900 m a.s.l.

FORMICARIIDAE

Barred Antthrush *Chamaeza mollissima* Sclater, 1855 - On 13 March 2006 a single individual was found while performing bird surveys in the buffer zone of Sangay National Park, near "El Retiro" (San Antonio de la Montaña), Tungurahua. The bird walked along the edge of a forest trail with limited light and very densely packed epiphytic growth on most overhanging branches. Subsequently the species was found to be quite vocal on June 2006 and 2007. On the latter date, one individual was observed with a juvenile. Considered as very rare to rare in Ecuador, the status of this species was discussed by Ridgely and Greenfield (2001), wherein the authors mentioned old specimens from Baños but no recent records. It seems likely that this species is distributed continuously along the eastern slope of the Ecuadorian Andes, as suggested by Krabbe *et al.* (1998) and the previous authors.

TYRANNIDAE

Mouse-Colored Tyrannulet *Phaeomyias murina* (Spix, 1825) - This species was first seen on 25 April 2009 at Casa Upano (Morona-Santiago province) as it captured insects by sallying from a citrus tree. Subsequently, this species has been recorded occasionally, and it has been observed to join Sooty-headed Tyrannulet *Phyllomyias griseiceps* (Sclater & Salvin, 1871) and Bananaquit *Coereba flaveola* (Linnaeus, 1758) in garden trees. Additionally, on 15 September 2009 a single Mouse-colored Tyrannulet was heard making a blurry trill from a patch of dense second growth in the hummingbird gardens (lower section) of Wild Sumaco Lodge (Napo province, 1,200 m a.s.l., 00°28'0" S, 77°35'60" W) and was subsequently seen well and confirmed for the first time on the slopes of the nearby Sumaco Volcano. Our records extend its altitudinal distribution (1,200 m a.s.l. in Sumaco) and are the first for the province of Morona-Santiago (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001; 2006).

Red-Billed Tyrannulet *Zimmerius cinereicapillus* (Cabanis, 1873) - This species was first recorded at Casa Upano on 7 January 2009, when we observed an individual moving through trees in the garden. Since then, it has been seen twice a month, only infrequently vocalizing with the species' distinctive call-notes. Considered rare to uncommon along the eastern foothills (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001; 2006), our records are the first for Morona-Santiago province and fill a gap in the distribution, suggesting a more continuous presence than was previously documented.

Cliff Flycatcher *Hirundinea ferruginea* (Gmelin, 1788) - On the 10 April 2005 an individual of this species was found perched on power lines in front the entrance to the Represa Hidroeléctrica San Francisco (1, 400 m a.s.l., 01°23'50.1" S, 78°21'24.7" W), along the Baños-Puyo main road (Tungurahua province). Since this date the species has been found with regularity in the surroundings and, in 2008, at least three individuals were seen in late March, suggesting local breeding. The Cliff Flycatcher was first found in Ecuador in the Napo province, but later found at a number of localities in the northern and southern provinces (see details in Ridgely and Greenfield 2001). The records presented herein fill the geographic gap and are the first for Tungurahua province, confirming its presence in east-central Ecuador as well. It is possible that the increasing construction of roads traversing the Andes along a west-east axis may increase the number of exposed cliffs (nesting and foraging habitat) and encourage the colonization of areas with previous limited accessibility and suitable habitat.

Rufous-Tailed Tyrant *Knipolegus poecilurus* (Sclater, 1862) - Along the Baños-Puyo Road, in 2005-2006, at rock faces along the Río Topo Road (Tunguarahua province, 1,200 m a.s.l., 01°25' S, 78° W), two individuals were found fly-catching in typical fashion from the short vegetation growing from the cliff faces. As this species has subsequently been seen here by others (L. Jost, personal communication), to occur regularly in this area. Previously known only from the northern and southern provinces (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001; 2006), this record fills a gap in its distribution, and represents the first provincial record for Tungurahua.

COTINGIDAE

Spangled Cotinga *Cotinga cayana* (Linnaeus, 1776) - On the afternoon of 5 March 2008 a single bird was spotted from the look-out of Cabañas Yankuam (Zamora-Chinchipe). It was perched high in a tree in the riparian forest along Río Nangaritza. The bird was studied well for 5 minutes and a contrasting speckled pattern on head and mantle were noted together with distinctly dark wings, separating it from its close congener Plum-throated Cotinga *C. maynana* (Linnaeus, 1766). Spangled Cotinga is considered uncommon to locally fairly common in the canopy of *terra firme* forest in Amazonian lowlands, usually below 400 m a.s.l. but locally up to 600 m a.s.l. (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001; 2006). Our record extends its upper altitudinal limit to 900 m a.s.l.

THRAUPIDAE

Chesnut-Vented Conebill *Conirostrum speciosum* (Temminck, 1824) - On 10 March 2008 a single female plumaged bird was found in the vicinity of Valladolid (Zamora-Chinchipe province, 1,500 m a.s.l., 04°33' S, 79°08' W). The bird actively foraged in the distal portions of a flowering *Ochroma* sp. tree (Bombacaceae), loosely associating with a family group of three Bananaquit *C. flaveola*. On 14 December 2008 a female was observed in the gardens of Casa Upano (Morona-Santiago), associated with a flowering *Inga* sp. tree (Fabaceae), and a few days later was seen travelling with a male in a *Ficus* sp. tree (Moraceae). This species is regarded as rare and local, and is only known from a few sites along the eastern slope of the Andes (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001; 2006). Additionally, Freile (2004) provided the first modern record of this species from the eastern lowlands in the Sucumbíos province. Our records are the first for the province of Morona-Santiago, suggesting a continuous distribution along the foothills of the eastern Andes.

Stattersfield *et al.* (1998) defined the eastern slopes of the Andes, from southernmost Colombia to Northernmost Peru (over the entire length of Ecuador), as an Endemic

Bird Area (EBA). Also of interest, the lowlands and foothills below 1,300 m a.s.l., on both sides of the Andes, harbor 30 % of Ecuador's avifauna (Sierra *et al.* 1999), and there are at least five Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the eastern foothills (Freile and Santander 2005). Although the distribution of the avifauna in this region of Ecuador is relatively well known when compared to neighboring countries (see Salaman *et al.* 2002), the new records presented herein and those recently provided by Guevara *et al.* (2008), reveal the need for further studies. Some of our observations likely reflect dispersal into recently deforested areas (*i.e. Vanellus chilensis*, *Otus choliba*, *Phaeomyias murina*), while others involve records from areas that remain little visited (*i.e.* Sangay; *Chamaeza mollissima*) or remote locations (*i.e.* Cordillera del Condor; *Cotinga cayana*) where new species for the country have recently been recorded (Krabbe and Alhman 2009). Although Guevara *et al.* (2008) have mentioned that range extensions due to anthropogenic habitat alteration are not a recent observable fact, there are some evidences of this occurring for open-habitat bird species, and a strong need to actually verify and complement such hypothesis, especially on a long term basis.

Currently, natural habitats on north-east Andean slopes face serious pressures due to human activities such as logging, cattle farming, and agriculture, which have transformed forest landscapes into extensive areas of degraded habitat over the last several decades (Freile and Santander 2005). We urge those holding new records to make these available to a wider audience by publishing them. Such records are essential for elucidating the poorly known and dynamic avifauna of this region. Following the creation of the directory of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) for Ecuador (Freile and Santander 2005), we hope for the development of local support groups within each IBA, and for more attention paid to the conservation, natural history, and distribution of birds in this region. Such information is crucial for those working with local land-owners and for the development and implementation of proper landscape management plans needed to sustain the biodiversity of this and other Neotropical forests.

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